



Testimony to Connecticut General Assembly Transportation Committee
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Amanda Kennedy, Connecticut Director, Regional Plan Association

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Amanda Kennedy

My name is Amanda Kennedy and I'm the Director of the Connecticut office of Regional Plan Association. We're a non-profit organization that's been providing research and leadership on planning & development issues impacting the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region since our founding in the 1920s. I know it's still pretty early in the session so I'm going to focus my comments more generally on a couple of recurring themes reflected in several of the bills that are up for comment today. First, Senate Bill 626, introduced by Senator Boucher, would provide economic incentives and assistance for transit-oriented development. I know this is an ongoing priority for many of us. The Malloy administration has announced that there will be an inter-agency task force focused on removing barriers to TOD- but it's still not clear what the product of the task force will be. It's really important that the agencies hear a clear legislative mandate from the Assembly that we're not just giving lip service to TOD. We've been to a lot of meetings on this subject and concluded that what we need is not necessarily more money but for communities that encourage transit ridership through complementary development to be given priority for existing state funds. We're actually seeing this on the federal level, with projects supported by HUD's Sustainable Communities Initiative receiving special attention from partner agencies including EPA and DOT. We're part of one of these projects in Southwestern Connecticut along with Bridgeport and Norwalk and they've been able to submit applications that are given preference because they are part of the Sustainable Communities initiative. It's giving them an edge in competing for scarce funding. So we support the concept of this bill and hope that it will move forward.

House Bill 5126 would provide funding for a bike/ped connection between the new train station in West Haven and the new Yale West campus in West Haven and Orange. These are the types of project the state should be giving support to. We should be looking to maximize our train stations as much as possible by improving our bike/ped systems around them. This bike/ped project will increase ridership at the West Haven station by giving more people options to reach the station without needing a car or a parking place and will help West Haven's businesses to benefit from the redevelopment of the Bayer campus. New Haven has the highest cycling rate in the state partly due to its popularity with Yale students and staff and we should be looking to continue that trend in West Haven.

A third related bill is Senate Bill 227, which would expand rail service on the Waterbury branch. RPA has always been intrigued by the potential of the villages and towns along the Waterbury line to build TOD. The communities of Seymour, Beacon Falls, Naugatuck, and Waterbury have already put regulations in place that would allow the kind of walkable infill development that supports transit use. So there is huge potential for economic development along the line, but right now the service is just too infrequent right now for it to inspire much complementary development.

RPA continues to support the Vulnerable Users bill 191 as written. We'd also like to see House Bill 5449 create a rail commuter council for the New Haven-Springfield line which could provide a link between the Department of Transportation, the riders, and the communities they come from. A year or so ago, we hosted a forum in Rocky Hill on what Connecticut needs to benefit from the New Haven- Springfield project and speakers from California and Maine both said that it's important to have an engaged stakeholder group that can speak on behalf of the needs of the project at both the state and local levels.